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# **COMMISSION ON RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD TANF-FUNDED RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS**

EVALUATION REPORT  
FEBRUARY 28, 2003



# **A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF FIVE TANF-FUNDED RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS IN FLORIDA**

## **Executive Summary**

Over a recent 32 month period, Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, in partnership with Workforce Florida, Inc., administered five locally based programs under a model called Equipping Parents to Strengthen Families. The programs were operative in Brevard, Broward, Dade, Leon and Polk counties. These programs were part of Florida's welfare reform initiative and served 980 low-income noncustodial parents by helping them find and maintain stable employment, make their child support payments and improve their relationships with their children. The programs were budgeted at \$2.86 million, or about \$2,921 per participant, with local sources accounting for 23 percent of those costs. The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, which is responsible for evaluating the Commission's programs, prepared this evaluation report to answer certain key questions about the programs' implementation and performance. The evaluation involved both qualitative and quantitative data analyses and was conducted in accordance with nationally recognized professional standards for program evaluation.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this evaluation. The programs essentially did what they were designed to do, providing a stabilizing influence on the lives of program participants who were often faced with numerous challenges. In particular, the programs provided tangible assistance that resulted in job placements for almost half of their participants and improved job retention for one-fourth of those participants who were successfully placed. The programs also provided practical guidance for improving parenting skills which resulted in some measurable improvement in attitudes toward parenting and child support responsibilities. Though attempts to measure changes in the level of participants' interactions with their children were inconclusive, the evaluation did generate several constructive suggestions for any future programs of similar design. The remainder of this executive summary provides additional detail about these conclusions.

### **Did the Programs Do What They Said They Would Do?**

All of the program sites quickly developed regular procedures to recruit and enroll eligible participants within their defined service areas. They secured community

partners, including the local family law court, child support offices, job centers, training facilities, and a variety of local agencies that provided needed services such as housing, medical and mental health consultation, transportation and other services. The programs also established routines for helping program participants secure employment, including initial employability assessments, pre-employment counseling, job referrals and other related services. Program staff maintained regular contact with employed participants and their employers to improve the likelihood that they would remain employed for six months or longer.

In addition to emphasizing employment, the programs focused on improving participants' relations with their children. Parenting skills classes were offered as an integral part of the program design, and sites regularly assessed participants' attitudes toward parenting, their child support obligations and the frequency of their interaction with their children.

Three of the sites had problems initially in adhering to the case management model upon which the programs were designed. This sometimes resulted in incomplete data, inflated caseloads or, in some cases, incomplete or unverifiable participant records. Most of these problems had improved considerably by the last year of program operations.

### **How Were Program Activities Similar or Different at the Five Program Sites?**

The five programs were much more similar than they were different. The core activities for employment assistance and child involvement were much the same at all of the sites. Minor operational differences among the sites included the following points.

- Three sites relied heavily on court-referrals while the other two received their participants exclusively from community referrals and word of mouth.
- Three sites used their staff as specialists (employment, social work, etc.), while the other two used a generalist approach.
- One site served a multi-county area, two sites served a single county and the other two sites served defined urban neighborhoods within their community.
- There were four different parenting skills curricula selected by the five sites, although they all addressed the same topics.

Participant characteristics and outcomes do not appear to differ appreciably as a result of any of these operational differences.

### **Who Were the Program Participants and Their Children?**

The gender profile for all program participants supports the idea that these were responsible fatherhood programs, since 89 percent of participants were male. Other significant participant statistics include the following observations.

- Participants were predominantly black (80%).
- Participants were between 17 and 64 years of age, with a median age of 30.5.
- Most participants (54%) lived with others (including 12% who lived with their own parents).
- 43% of participants had only one child, but a substantial minority (28%) had three or more children.
- The ages of participants' children were well dispersed across the range from newborn to age 18.
- A large minority (40%) of participants could not provide accurate information on the ages of all of their children, strongly suggesting that they had, at best, only very limited interaction with those children.
- A sizeable minority (23%) of male participants had fathered their children with more than one mother.
- Most (58%) of the participants' relationships with the other parent of their children were non-marital.

### **What Were the Barriers to Securing Employment?**

Program participants faced a number of obstacles in their quest to become employed, and some of those obstacles were significant. A very large majority (86%) of them had at least one significant barrier that made it difficult for an employer to consider them seriously. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of all participants (69%) compounded the difficulty by having multiple barriers.

Some of the barriers were related to work preparedness, including participants with less than a high school education (35%) or a lack of any useful work skills (30%). Other barriers related primarily to the social preparedness of an individual in being ready, willing or able to work. More than half of the participants had transportation limitations (58%) or criminal records (55%). Other notable barriers were the presence of substance abuse issues (20%) and medical or mental health limitations (18%).

### **Were Program Participants Able to Retain and Keep Jobs?**

The program was based on the idea that remunerative work would be required to enable program participants to have the financial wherewithal to make their child support payments. Thus, the degree to which the programs were able to help their participants get jobs was a key outcome for the program.

The programs were successful in making job placements for almost half (48%) of their participants over the life of the program, despite the barriers to employment presented by the participants. Of the participants who secured employment, 42 percent had full time jobs while 6 percent secured part-time, seasonal or temporary jobs. Of those participants who did get a job, one in four (25%) retained the position for six months or longer. Better results are possible. The program data show that three of the individual program sites (Broward, Dade and Polk) had placement rates above 60 percent, and two (Dade and Brevard) had retention rates above 40 percent.

### **Did Participants Improve Their Record of Making Child Support Payments?**

Child support data on participants' obligations and records of payment are closely held by the Department of Revenue and were not systematically available to enable a comprehensive analysis of how much program participants owed or whether they were making progress in reducing their backlog of indebtedness. However, data from one typical month (November 2001) became available at one of the program sites (Polk) for 41 participants whose cases were then open. Although this data set was limited in size and scope, the analysis offered a revealing "moment in time" portrait of the substantial financial obligation that child support orders can represent for noncustodial parents.

- A slight majority (56%) of the participants made at least some payment on their child support account during the month, but most of those payments were for less than the monthly amount due.
- A large majority (83%) of all of these participants, comprising all of those who did not pay plus most of those who did, were more indebted at the end of the month than they had been at the beginning.
- The average child support obligation rose from \$8,558 at the beginning of the month to \$8,807 at the end of the month (an annualized increase of almost \$3,000 a year).
- About half (51%) of these participants owed more than \$5,000, so they could potentially be prosecuted as felons under Florida law.

### **Did Program Participants Improve Their Parenting Experiences?**

A unique feature of the program model was the emphasis on the importance of developing good parent-child interaction with noncustodial parents. The concept was that better attitudes toward parenting and better interactions with children would improve the participants' motivation for making their child support payments. The programs measured changes in participants' attitudes toward their parenting and child rearing responsibilities with a standard instrument called the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI). The analysis of the available "before and after" AAPI scores

confirmed that participants showed an improvement in their score that was statistically significant and is attributable to the program's intervention.

Participants' attendance at parenting classes was weak, but there were indications that a better record was possible. Overall, only 11 percent of the participants attended seven or more parenting classes, but the attendance record of participants served during the program's last year was much better (22%). Attempts to measure changes in the frequency and quality of participants' visits with their children were inconclusive. Such information was difficult to obtain, and when it was available, the results were often inconsistent and counter-intuitive.

### **What Lessons Have Been Learned for Future Programs of Similar Design?**

This program evaluation generated several suggestions for improving the likelihood that future programs will be successful. Among them are the following points.

- Data on child support obligations and payments would be necessary for a full understanding of program impact. To obtain such data, the cooperation of the Department of Revenue should be secured early in the program planning phase.
- The case management model is essential. Any future programs should require local program directors to have MSW degrees and demonstrable experience with operating programs that are based on the case management model.
- Community partners play a vital role in supporting the work of the individual programs. Any future programs should similarly cultivate a strong, interactive network of all appropriate local officials and service providers who can be consulted when need arises.
- One area that would benefit from further research would be to explore the question of "what works" for employment programs serving clients with criminal records.
- A second area that would benefit from further research would involve identifying other programs that offer parenting skills classes to elicit transferable ideas for boosting the participants' record of attendance.
- Program staff observed that the logistics of serving female noncustodial parents often required special attention. Future programs should consider limiting their participant base to males in order to provide more focused attention that is not distracted by the need to make special arrangements for females whose needs are different.
- Any future programs that envision having a multi-site operation should ensure that their programs have a uniform logic model, comparable and reasonable performance targets and a single parenting class curriculum.
- The problem of measuring participants' interaction with their children requires further development. Asking participants at the time of case closure to compare their attitudes at closure with what they had been at the beginning is one promising idea.

# **A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF FIVE TANF-FUNDED RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS IN FLORIDA**

## **Introduction and Purpose**

From May 2000 through December 2002, Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, in partnership with Workforce Florida, Inc., administered five programs under a model called Equipping Parents to Strengthen Families. These programs were part of Florida's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) welfare reform initiative and served almost 1,000 noncustodial parents in Florida during the two and a half year time period. They were intended to help participants find and maintain stable employment, make their child support payments and improve their relationship with their children. The programs were initially implemented in designated service areas in five counties (Brevard, Broward, Dade, Leon and Polk), although one of those sites (Leon) closed in June 2002, six months earlier than the other four. Since more than 90 percent of the participants in these programs were male, the programs are generally referred to as responsible fatherhood programs. The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida is responsible for evaluating the Commission's programs, and this evaluation report is consonant with that responsibility.

The Commission's programs were designed in accordance with Florida's Work First welfare reform model that is the basis of TANF. Program participants were low-income individuals who were unemployed and in need of assistance to locate and secure a job in order to stabilize their economic situation, enabling them to make their required child support payments. Program activities to assist with this included assessing the employability of participants, providing practical advice on how to secure a job and visiting employed individuals to monitor their progress and encourage them to maintain their employment. The programs were also designed to help improve participants' parenting skills and the quality of their interaction with their children as a way of improving their motivation to make required child support payments. In support of this, the programs provided services such as individual and group counseling sessions, assistance with child visitations and classes on how to be a better parent.

During the 32-month period these five programs operated, they served a total of 980 program participants at a total budgeted cost of \$2,862,160. The average cost per program participant was \$2,921. The program was structured to require a minimum local program match of 10 percent, and over the life of the program, the total local match was budgeted at \$669,174, or 23 percent. Exhibit 1 identifies each of the five local programs

that participated in the Equipping Parents to Strengthen Families model and provides summary data on the total number of program participants served and total budget allocations over the life of the program.

**Exhibit 1: Five TANF-Funded Responsible Fatherhood Programs in Florida – Program Participants Served and Total Budget Allocations, 2000-2003**

County	Local Program Name	Total Number of Participants Served	Number Contracted to Serve <sup>1</sup>	TANF Funding	Local Match Funding	Total Funding
Brevard	Parent Resource and Education Program (PREP)	125	200	\$457,286	\$112,679	\$569,965
Broward	Parents Organized to Prevent Separation (POPS) Program	128	110	\$432,774	\$388,258	\$821,032
Dade	Fatherhood Advancement Through Healthier Emotional Relationships and Support (FATHERS) Project	111	90	\$399,000	\$61,809	\$460,809
Leon	Project Child Support	311	130	\$378,648	\$52,500	\$431,148
Polk	Noncustodial Parent Employment Program (NCPEP)	305	185	\$524,278	\$54,928	\$579,206
<b>Totals</b>		980	715	\$2,191,986	\$670,174	\$2,862,160

Sources: Fatherhood Management Information System database (participants served) and program contracts with the Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, Inc., for fiscal years 2000-2001, 2001-2002, and 2002-2003 (budget data)

This program evaluation report includes an assessment of the programs' implementation and operation, an analysis of the program participants and a review of what is currently

<sup>1</sup> The "contracted to serve" numbers are for fiscal years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 only. For fiscal year 2002-2003, the contracts were written to emphasize close-out work for participants whose cases were already open, and no targets were included for new participants. Of the total of 980 program participants cited here, 943 were opened during fiscal years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, thus collectively exceeding the enrollment target of 715 for those two years.

known about key outcomes for participants. The contents of each of the nine report sections are briefly outlined as follows.

- Did the programs do what they said they would do? This section reviews the programs' experiences with implementing their programs locally, with a focus on the degree to which the original program descriptions matched the reality of program operations.
- How were the program activities and services similar or different at the five program sites? Although the five programs shared common purposes, this section describes some structural and operational differences.
- Who were the program participants and their children? A review of the case files for 219 program participants whose cases were current at the approximate mid-point during which these programs operated provided a solid basis for creating a composite portrait of the low-income noncustodial parents and their children who were served by these programs.
- What were the barriers to securing employment? The case file review also focused on quantifying and describing the various barriers, which were numerous and often formidable, that program participants often faced when trying to obtain employment.
- Were program participants able to secure and maintain stable employment? This section describes the degree to which the programs were able to assist participants first to obtain and then keep a job.
- Did program participants improve their record of making child support payments? This section discusses what is known about participants' records of payments made to meet court-ordered child support obligations.
- Did program participants improve their parenting experiences? This section describes whether the programs' parenting skills classes and related efforts had a beneficial influence on attitudes or the regularity and quality of parental visits.
- Conclusions and lessons learned for future programs of similar design: This section summarizes the issues programs encountered and discusses how the process could be more efficient, detailing current limitations of collecting and interpreting participant outcome information.
- Methodology notes: This program evaluation followed generally accepted evaluation standards, and these are more fully referenced in this section.

## **Did the Programs Do What They Said They Would Do?**

All five of the responsible fatherhood programs organized themselves in a fashion that was consistent with the program descriptions initially outlined in their subcontracts and were structurally able to do what they said they would do. They all established an administrative mechanism for recruiting and enrolling eligible program participants. From a programmatic perspective, they all provided participants with practical assistance in obtaining employment and guidance on becoming a better parent. Furthermore, the programs were all part of a larger context of services and organizations within their respective communities. One weak spot of program implementation was that the programs were designed in accord with a case management social work model; however, three of the program sites did not properly follow the model, negatively affecting the quality of data available for evaluation purposes.

### **Recruiting and Enrolling Program Participants**

The program sites all adopted regular procedures for recruiting and enrolling program participants from within their defined service areas. The criteria for program participant eligibility were essentially similar at the five sites: unemployed noncustodial parents with limited incomes who were obligated to make regular child support payments. Regardless of whether the child support obligation was new or long standing, meeting that obligation was (and is) a challenge for all participants. The participants were referred to the programs directly from the office of the local family law court or from any of various participating community agencies in a network of local social services providers. There were also participants at all five sites who were self-referrals; they typically learned about the program from the experience of other participants or from seeing posters or other community advertising that had been distributed by the program. As already noted in Exhibit 1, the programs enrolled 980 participants during the 32-month period that the programs were operative. This included 943 participants enrolled during fiscal years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, which exceeded the total enrollment target of 715 for that two-year period.

After a program made its first contact with a prospective participant, the enrollment and orientation process was initiated, although it might take two or three individual meetings to complete. Orientation was most often an individual encounter, although parts of it were sometimes conducted as a group process when multiple participants were referred on a given day. During these initial encounters with participants, program staff verified the participant's eligibility, explained the program's purpose and clarified the program's expectations about participants' willingness to participate in activities including job searches and parenting classes. During these early meetings the participants signed forms

consenting to their participation in the program and authorizing the program to collect data about them.

Program staff also collected background data about participants to help the staff work with participants to get a job, reach a better understanding of their child support responsibilities and improve their interaction with their children. These data were collected on standard program forms, the paper copies of which were maintained in individual case files kept in secure office locations to maintain the confidentiality of this sometimes sensitive information.<sup>2</sup> Much of that data were also entered into the Fatherhood Management Information System database, which constitutes the official record of program participants and the services they subsequently received.

### **Helping Participants Secure and Maintain Employment**

Assisting the members of this target group to get a job was typically a prolonged process that involved several steps. For most program participants, the first step occurred during the enrollment and orientation phase. During these early encounters, program staff engaged participants in candid and sensitive discussions to assess their employment history and identify barriers (such as criminal records, limited education, or lack of transportation) they must overcome in order to obtain a job.<sup>3</sup> This information could also be added later as program staff continued to work with and gradually learn more about participants. Program staff at all five sites reported that they were often presented with participants who had no job history and little practical understanding of what they would need to do to get and keep a job. This limitation would begin with misconceptions about suitable attire and grooming for a workplace environment and would continue with the importance of punctuality, regularity and a willing attitude toward work. Thus, the basic employability assessment conducted at the outset could result in program staff providing individual or small group counseling that would emphasize practical steps toward getting a job, including getting a haircut, wearing clean clothes, setting an alarm clock and arriving on time, and getting along with others at the workplace.

Some programs offered various types of further assistance to participants, including the preparation of individual résumés, assistance with completing individual job applications, providing help in reading and interpreting the want ads or using computerized job directories and providing guidance in how to behave during a job interview. One tangible type of assistance that was sometimes available was a specific job referral that program staff might have been able to obtain from a cooperative local employer, although

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<sup>2</sup> The standard program forms evolved over the life of the program, and some forms varied among the program sites. The Fatherhood Management Information System was extensively overhauled in early 2002, and the final version of program data collection forms for all programs were standardized in the field as of April 1, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The barriers that these program participants faced were a *very* important factor when considering the operations of these programs, since only a relatively small number of participants (14%) had no barriers at all, while a majority of them (69%) had multiple barriers. Because of its significance, this issue is described in greater detail in a separate section below.

such prospects were not always available. The programs also provided some participants with transportation assistance (typically in the form of free bus passes) to enable them to get to a job interview or to the first few days on the job. Since 58% of all program participants either did not have a driver's license or access to reliable transportation, this relatively simple form of assistance was critically important for some participants.

During the early stage of the programs' casework, when program staff were still developing a working relationship with participants and participants had not yet acquired a job, program staff would try to maintain frequent contact with participants. When regular contact could be achieved, it helped reinforce the importance of getting a job. It also provided an opportunity for program staff to provide a positive atmosphere of moral support and encouragement for participants, and it gave them a chance to check on the participant's progress and provide practical job-hunting advice and assistance when needed. If participants did not appear when they were expected, program staff would make an effort to contact them and encourage their continued involvement with the program.

The programs also maintained regular contact with the participants during later stages, after they had successfully obtained a job, to reinforce the importance of staying employed and developing a solid track record of employability. Program staff documented information about any jobs that participants would obtain and contacted the employer at subsequent intervals to confirm the status of continued employment. .

### **Helping Program Participants Become Better Parents**

Obtaining a job in order to make child support payments was only one part of these programs' design. They also shared the premise that if noncustodial parents were able to have good or steadily improving experiences in their role as a parent, including having more frequent and better interactions with their children, they would be more motivated to be more involved and that would help influence the regularity with which they made their child support payments. Thus, the programs included questions and activities related to assessing the participants' attitudes toward parenting and their child support obligation and the frequency of their interaction with their children. They also provided regular parenting skills classes as an integral part of each program's services to participants.

The parenting skills classes run by the programs were typically two-hour sessions held during evening hours at a generally accessible location in the community, such as a community center or the program office. They occurred on a regular weekly sequence, and the cycle of parenting classes was repeated three or four times a year at each site to accommodate participants who joined the program at different times. Topics covered during the sequence of classes included personal development, life skills, responsible fatherhood, relationships and health and sexuality, and they could also include a wide

range of other topics, such as anger management, age-appropriate discipline for children and the importance of making child support payments.

Because these classes occurred in sequence, the program design included an implicit assumption that regular attendance at these classes would promote a sense of group sharing that would help facilitate and reinforce the learning process. To encourage participants to attend, program staff regularly discussed attendance at classes when they were contacting participants for other reasons, and they tried to ensure that transportation was available for those who expressed interest in attending. They also regularly provided refreshments or offered prizes as inducements toward class attendance.<sup>4</sup>

### **Responsible Fatherhood Programs and the Community Context**

All of the program sites established their programs for helping noncustodial parents obtain jobs and become better parents within a larger community context. All of them successfully made their program's purpose and services known to a network of community partners, beginning with officials who work with the local family law court or the state child support enforcement office. These local networks also included a number of entities involved with employment or education, such as locally based career centers, GED education centers, local school boards, community colleges and technical training centers. Still other community partners included organizations that focus on the provision of specific services, such as housing, food stamps, medical and mental health services, transportation, services to the disabled and many others. Churches and community action agencies were also part of the supportive network of community partners with which the programs interacted.

One reason why a strong network of community agencies and referral options was necessary is that the programs themselves could not meet all of their participants' many and varied needs. This was especially critical during the programs' first encounters with their participants. If program staff determined that a participant's particular situation required immediate attention before they would be able to work productively with them toward locating a job or participating in parenting classes, their first priority would be to stabilize that situation. When that need arose, a list of community partners and referral options would improve the program's ability to provide appropriate assistance. All of the program directors maintained that such situations were common. They consistently said that their ability to make a constructive response to their participants' needs during the first meetings was important in being able to generate trust for future progress. They were able to itemize several examples of the kinds of services and referrals that helped to meet participants' needs. While these were not all emergency situations, they generally reflected high priority concerns for the participants that could significantly affect their ability to focus on program activities, as illustrated by these examples.

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<sup>4</sup> The results of the programs' efforts to improve attitudes toward parenting through assessment instruments and parenting classes are described in more detail in the section below on program participants' attitudes toward parenting.

- A hungry participant who had not eaten in two days might receive a voucher for a meal at a nearby fast food restaurant or a referral to a community food closet.
- A participant who was homeless or about to be evicted might be referred to the local public housing office.
- A participant who was experiencing problems receiving public assistance to which he or she was entitled (e.g., Veterans Administration checks or disability payments) could receive assistance in locating someone within the appropriate office who could help them with their case.
- Participants who had family law problems pending (e.g., a divorce settlement, visitation rights, modification of child support decrees, etc.) could be referred to local legal assistance clinics or family law assistance programs.
- Participants who could be ascertained by program staff to have issues with alcohol or drug abuse could be referred to community services or clinics that could address substance abuse or community mental health problems.

### **Case Management Practices**

The responsible fatherhood programs were all designed in accordance with a classical case management approach of working cooperatively with program participants to achieve their goals; however, adherence to the case management model was problematic for some of the program sites. Case management is a social work concept in which participants' needs are assessed, activities and services that are appropriate for meeting those needs are arranged and regular subsequent follow-up is conducted. Those activities are also subject to periodic supervisory review to monitor the degree to which individual participants are making progress toward their goals. For cases where progress lags behind expectations, these supervisory reviews focus on whether the participant is still motivated to work with the program. If so, additional attention or new services may still have a positive impact and can be brought to bear on their behalf, but if the participant is uncooperative, the case should be closed as an unsuccessful effort upon which no further effort should be expended.

Case management specifically implies the functions of paying attention to participants' needs and changing situations and making a record of what occurs in the form of case management notes and other pertinent documentation maintained in the participants' individual case files. Supervisory review notes should also be part of the case file. The case manager is the agent through which the program operates to recruit participants, enroll them, assess them for a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and assist them with developing a practical approach toward accomplishing the objectives of the program. Responsible fatherhood program staff acted as case managers when they provided participants with guidance toward stabilizing their lives, making contacts with potential employers, or following through with visits with their children.

Two of the program sites (Dade and Polk) had developed effective case management practices by December 2001, the approximate mid-point of the programs. However, at the other three sites (Brevard, Broward and Leon) adherence to the case management model was much weaker. Case records at those sites were often incomplete and cumulatively pointed to a pattern of relatively weak case management. Some of the commonly encountered problems from those three sites as of the end of 2001 were as follows.

- Basic background data on program participants and their children were sometimes missing. Although some participant information was sensitive and might not have been easily available (e.g., questions about drug or alcohol use or family violence), there were many instances of missing data that should have been readily obtainable. For example, such information as a participant's living arrangement, relationship with the other parent of a particular child or the total number of children should reasonably have been expected to be available from a program participant who made more than a single contact with the program. If program staff were not able to collect such information during an initial consultation, it should have been added after subsequent contact. Alternatively, if contact had been lost with a participant, the case should have been closed.
- Assessments of participants' attitudes toward their parenting responsibilities were often either not conducted at all or were not consistently recorded. Although the program sites were supposed to assess participants using an assessment tool called the AAPI (Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory) during the early stages of the participant's involvement with the program, there were few examples of this from these three sites. The program design also called for the AAPI to be administered later to be able to determine if there had been an improvement during the time that the program had been providing services, but there were no examples of such subsequent tests from any of these sites.
- Cases were sometimes carried as "open cases" for prolonged periods when it was not clear whether the program actually had any meaningful contact with the participant. This resulted in an inflated caseload. It is reasonable to expect that some participants would fail to cooperate with program staff, but attempts to contact unresponsive participants should have been made and documented, and if those attempts proved unsuccessful, the case should have been closed.
- Some program data were maintained separately from the records in the participants' case files, making it difficult to substantiate the provision of services for individual participants. For example, attendance at parenting classes might have been noted on a sign-in sheet. However, if there was no subsequent transfer of that information to the case file for each of the attendees (with an entry in the case management notes for that participant), there was no effective way to review any individual participant's progress.
- The general absence of any case management notes was a particularly important problem for these three sites. They were maintained irregularly in files at the Brevard

and Broward program sites, and they were almost completely absent at the Leon program site. Case management notes comprise the central record of any participant's case file, so notes that were only incompletely kept or were entirely absent meant that it was impossible to substantiate the full range of activities and services that the participant was receiving. Furthermore, since case management notes also provide points of reference for a participant's progress, the absence of such notes means that no outside reviewer could reconstruct "the story" of what a participant's problems were. There was generally no other record in the case file identifying what plans had been made to address those problems, nor was it possible to monitor a participant's progress toward fulfilling the plan.

During 2002 there were several constructive steps taken to improve case management practices at all of the program sites, but some of the problems identified above proved quite persistent. Issues with case management were initially discussed with program site staff at the conclusion of site visits at the end of 2001, and further site visits were made to all five program sites in April and again in August 2002. During all of these visits, case management practices were discussed. In addition to on-site visits, staff with the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood communicated at least monthly with program site staff on data issues. The data system itself was revised in April 2002 to make it easier for the program sites to make data entries related to the case management services they provided. Also, the Leon program site, which had a particularly poor record of incomplete data, was closed at the end of June 2002. The cumulative results of these initiatives since April 2002 was an overall improvement in the completeness of the program data, but some inconsistencies (such as differences in services reporting among the remaining program sites) remained to the end of the program.

### **How Were the Program Activities and Services Similar or Different at the Five Program Sites?**

The organizational structures and operations of the five programs were much more similar than they were different. The objectives of securing employment for participants and improving their relationship with their children were the same, so the activities and services tended to be very similar as well, although each program site exhibited some variation from the others. There were four notable differences among the programs that are interesting enough to single out for particular mention. These differences were concerned with referral sources for participants, staffing functions, geographic focus of the programs and parenting class curricula. These differences are all described here in a neutral fashion, since the analyses of outcomes (presented in later sections of this report) provide no particular reason to believe that any one of these models presents advantages over the alternatives.

## **Referral Sources for Participants**

Three of the program sites predominantly served program participants who had been referred to the program in direct connection with their appearances in the local family law court. In Brevard, Leon, and Polk Counties, program participants were predominantly referred to the program either directly from the court or from the child support enforcement office that works with the court. The Broward and Dade County programs, by contrast, relied more heavily on community referrals and volunteer participants. The sources of referrals are summarized in Exhibit 2.

**Exhibit 2: Referral Sources for Program Participants by Program Site**

Program Site	Court or Child Support Enforcement Office		Community Source (Incl. Self-Referral)		Other Referral Source or Cannot Determine		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	49	96%	2	4%	0	0%	51
Broward	0	0%	40	87%	6	13%	46
Dade	0	0%	29	91%	3	9%	32
Leon	20	45%	9	20%	15 <sup>5</sup>	34%	44
Polk	38	83%	6	13%	2	4%	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>219</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

Program staff at the sites where court-referrals predominate developed strong and regularly reinforced working relationships within the realm of the family law courts. Family law judges, family court administrative staff and state child support system workers (who, like the responsible fatherhood program staff, also interact regularly with the courts) all indicate that they are very familiar with and supportive of the purposes of the responsible fatherhood program in their community. They acknowledged that the programs serve an important need in providing practical assistance to noncustodial parents in their efforts to meet their child support obligations.

Program directors in two of the counties where court referrals predominated (Brevard and Polk) expressed interest during the course of the program in being able to recruit more participants as community referrals or volunteers. The rationale was that self-referred participants would be more strongly motivated to participate actively in program activities than those ordered by the court system.<sup>6</sup> However, no such transition occurred. The Brevard and Polk program sites remained heavily dependent upon court referrals throughout the program. One likely explanation for why Broward and Dade were more

<sup>5</sup> The unusually high number of “cannot determine” responses for the Leon County program site is part of a pattern of frequently missing data at that program site caused by inadequate case management oversight. On-site observations made during field visits support the conclusion that a majority of Leon participants were court-ordered, although this could not be confirmed through the file review.

<sup>6</sup> Although this is a plausible hypothesis, the available data on participant outcomes do not necessarily support it. Program outcomes are discussed in subsequent sections of this report.

successful in being able to recruit volunteer participants is that both of those sites operated in urban areas that have a relatively high population density that could provide them with the “critical mass” they needed to obtain a sufficient number of participants without resorting to court orders. Also, both of those sites had particularly strong community-based sponsors in the Urban League of Broward County and the Miami-Dade County Community Action Agency, respectively, and those organizations contributed to generating referrals using their own resources.

### **Staff Function Specialization**

The program sites developed two different approaches toward the division of workload responsibilities among the program staff who work directly with participants. At three of the sites (Broward, Dade, and Leon), there was a specialization of function such that most of the case management activities were conducted by some staff members while most of the employment-related activities were conducted by others. At these sites, the case managers generally had responsibility for initial contact and consultation with the participants, and they arranged for service referrals and individual consultations on non-employment matters. They also supervised or conducted the parenting skills classes, met regularly with participants and had the lead responsibility for ensuring that the participant’s case file was current. Under this specialization model, the employment specialists worked with participants on employability assessments, compilation of work histories, preparation of résumés and job applications, coaching participants on job hunting and interviewing skills, locating potential job prospects for participants and maintaining contact with both participants and employers once a job had been secured. The employment specialists at these three program sites were also primarily responsible for the case records and paperwork that were primarily related to participants’ efforts to find and retain jobs.

The Brevard and Polk County program sites both had, by contrast, a “generalist” approach to working with participants. Under this model, the program staff who worked with individual program participants were responsible for all of the activities and services associated with that individual, including both case management and employment support functions. In both of these counties the workload division was often made as a function of geography, with individual staff members being assigned all of the participants within given areas of the county. While this geographic division of responsibility was not a rigid criterion, program staff in those program sites said that when it did occur, it was a helpful way for them to be able to make their contacts with their assigned participants more efficiently.

## **Geographic Focus of the Programs**

There were three different patterns of geographic focus among the five program sites. The first model was the Leon County program site, which actually covered a multiple county area. The program there was officially designed to accommodate referrals of program participants from the entire second judicial circuit, which includes five other counties in addition to Leon.<sup>7</sup> However, in practice, Leon County participants constituted 95 percent of that program's caseload.

The second model was in effect in Brevard and Polk Counties, where the coverage was designed to be county-wide. Since Polk County is an especially large county and Brevard County is an especially long and narrow coastal county, both of those program sites emphasized at least some geographic specialization among their program staff as one way of making their services more efficient. The Polk County program operated within the county's One Stop Career Centers to maximize its accessibility for participants. Most of the staff were based in the main center in Lakeland, but there was also one staff person based at the county's satellite center in Winter Haven. Similarly, in Brevard County, participants tended to be clustered within three population clusters that were located in the north, middle and south parts of the county, so many staff assignments were made on the basis of those geographic areas.

The third model was in effect in the two most urban program sites, in central Broward County and south Dade County. For both of those sites the identified service area was much more constrained than in any of the other three programs. This was made possible by the greater urban density that allowed the program to serve participants within a more confined area of only a few square miles rather than extending across an entire county.

## **Parenting Skills Education Curricula**

The five program sites used four different curricula for their parent skills training classes. When the contracts were originally issued for the programs, each program site was given the latitude to select a curriculum that would be best for their participants, providing that the curriculum met the general criteria. These criteria were that the curriculum should have at least ten components and should include at a minimum individual units on personal development, life skills, responsible fatherhood, relationships, and health and sexuality. In response, the programs used the curricula identified in Exhibit 3.

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<sup>7</sup> The other counties in the second judicial circuit are Franklin, Gadsden, Jefferson, Liberty and Wakulla.

### Exhibit 3: Parenting Skills Education Curricula by Program Site

Program Site	Name of Curriculum	Author or Publisher	Year	Number of Units
Brevard and Polk	<i>Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers</i>	Pamela Wilson, MSW, and Jeffrey Johnson, Ph.D., National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership	1994	10
Broward	<i>Responsible Fatherhood Curriculum</i>	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation	2000	10
Dade	<i>Effective Black Parenting, and Child Care Program Notes</i>	Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, and Florida Department of Children and Families	1996	10
Leon	<i>Nurturing Fathers Program</i>	Mark Perlman, Center for Growth and Development	1998	13

Source: Program Directors for the individual program sites

## Who Were the Program Participants and Their Children?

At the approximate mid-point of the programs' tenure, staff with the Ounce of Prevention Fund and Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood conducted a file review of almost all of the case files that were open at the time of the site visits (late November and early December 2001). These 219 case files (representing from 32 to 51 program participants at each site) provided a "moment in time" portrait of participants at each site and at all sites cumulatively.<sup>8</sup> These data are presented primarily as a series of tables in this section. The demographic profile provides comparative data on the gender, race, age and living arrangements of program participants. A second sub-section presents highlights of what is known about the children of the participants and also of the other parent (usually the mother) of those children.

### Demographic Profile of the Program Participants

Noncustodial parents in general tend to be predominantly male, and these five responsible fatherhood programs reflected that reality. As shown in Exhibit 4, 89 percent of all program participants were male. Furthermore, at one program site (Broward), all of them were male, while only one of the sites that served females (Brevard) had more than a handful of them as part of their caseload. Program staff said that female participants

<sup>8</sup> The file review provides a more representative basis for the demographic profile presented in this section than the database of the Fatherhood Management Information System. The rationale for this argument is presented in the methodology notes section at the end of this report.

generally had slightly different case histories than males. Their inclusion in the programs was generally related to situations where the state had been obliged to intervene and place these mothers' children in the homes of relatives because of the mother's own inability to care for them due to child abuse and neglect, substance abuse or incarceration. In such situations, the mother is liable to the state for the child support costs, which prompted their appearance in the same family court arena as the court-referred noncustodial fathers. In practice, the programs that served females sometimes had to meet individually with female program participants, since their inclusion in small group workshops of men could be problematic if they prompted antagonistic responses or withdrawal from the male participants.

#### Exhibit 4: Program Participants' Gender by Program Site

Program Site	Male		Female		Total
	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	36	71%	15	29%	51
Broward	46	100%	0	0%	46
Dade	29	91%	3	9%	32
Leon	41	93%	3	7%	44
Polk	42	91%	4	9%	46
<b>Total</b>	194	89%	25	11%	219

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

The racial profile of these programs was dominated by African Americans who comprised 80 percent of all of the program participants. However, as Exhibit 5 shows, there was some variation in the balance among the individual programs. While two program sites (Leon and Broward) were all or almost all black, two others (Brevard and Polk) had sizable minorities of white and a few Hispanic participants as part of their caseload, and the other (Dade) included a small, but noticeable, minority of Hispanics.

#### Exhibit 5: Program Participants' Race by Program Site

Program Site	White		Black		Hispanic		Other		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	20	39%	27	53%	4	8%	0	0%	51
Broward	0	0%	45	98%	1	2%	0	0%	46
Dade	0	0%	28	88%	3	9%	1	3%	32
Leon	0	0%	44	100%	0	0%	0	0%	44
Polk	13	28%	31	67%	2	4%	0	0%	46
<b>Total</b>	33	15%	175	80%	10	5%	1	<1%	219

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

Program participants represented a fairly wide range of ages from 17 to 64, with the median age for all program participants being 30.5 years.<sup>9</sup> As shown in Exhibit 6, there was some variation among the five individual program sites, with the more urban areas

<sup>9</sup> The age range distribution for all five program sites is skewed to right, so the median age (rather than the mean) is the preferred measure of central tendency.

served by the programs in Broward and Dade Counties reflecting younger sets of program participants than the other sites.

#### **Exhibit 6: Program Participants' Average Age and Minimum and Maximum Age by Program Site**

<b>Program Site</b>	<b>Average (Median) Age</b>	<b>Minimum Age</b>	<b>Maximum Age</b>	<b>Total</b>
Brevard	33	20	64	51
Broward	26	17	52	46
Dade	29	18	54	32
Leon	31	18	54	43
Polk	31.5	20	55	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>218</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001; one case from the Leon County program site lacked participant age data

Data on living arrangements of program participants reflects in part the limited economic resources available to them. As shown in Exhibit 7, a majority of program participants (54%) tended to live with others, while only some of them (27%) have the financial wherewithal to be leaseholders in their own right, and only a small number (4%) are homeowners. Program staff reported that for some participants the only living arrangement that is available to them is to reside with one or both of their own parents. Thus, some noncustodial parents – possibly as many as one out of eight – were obliged to make payments to support their children but were simultaneously being supported tangibly by their own parents who provided them with housing.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Exhibit 7: Program Participants' Living Arrangements by Program Site**

<b>Program Site</b>	<b>Homeowner</b>		<b>Rent</b>		<b>Live with Others</b>		<b>Other Living Arrangement</b>		<b>Cannot Determine</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>	
Brevard	0	0%	20	39%	26	51%	2	4%	3	6%	51
Broward	0	0%	1	2%	42	91%	0	0%	3	7%	46
Dade	3	9%	14	44%	10	31%	5	16%	0	0%	32
Leon	4	9%	13	30%	9	20%	1	2%	17 <sup>11</sup>	39%	44
Polk	1	2%	11	24%	31	67%	1	2%	2	4%	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>219</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

<sup>10</sup> The file review on which the conclusions presented in Exhibit 7 are based was conducted before the data system was revised in April 2002 to include a new code that would identify more precisely the number of non-custodial parents living with their own parents. Of the 94 program participants whose cases were opened during the first six months after the new system was implemented, 11 participants (12%) were coded as “living with one or both parents,” compared with 42 (45%) coded as “living with others.”

<sup>11</sup> The unusually high number of “cannot determine” responses for the Leon County program site is probably a function of inadequate case management oversight.

## **Program Participants' Children and the Other Parents of Those Children**

Information on the children of the noncustodial parents served by these programs and on the other parents of their children is unfortunately incomplete, but the information that is available is sufficient to make several conclusions about them. Those data and conclusions are the subject of the following tables.

First, the number of children the participants had varies considerably. As Exhibit 8 shows, the largest single category (43%) is for participants with only one child, but a substantial minority of participants (28%) had three or more children. At the high end of the distribution, there are three program participants who reported having more than six children: a 29 year old black male from Leon County and a 38 year old black female from Polk County who each had nine children, and a 44 year old black male from Leon County who reported that he is the father of 18 children.

**Exhibit 8: Number of Children of Program Participants by Program Site**

Program Site	1 Child		2 Children		3 Children		4 Children		5+ Children		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	20	39%	20	39%	6	12%	3	6%	2	4%	51
Broward	24	52%	9	20%	10	22%	2	4%	1	2%	46
Dade	13	43%	7	23%	5	17%	4	13%	1	3%	30
Leon	19	49%	10	26%	2	5%	4	10%	4	10%	39
Polk	16	35%	14	30%	7	15%	3	7%	6	13%	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>212</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001; this table removes seven cases (two from Dade and five from Leon) in which there was some uncertainty about the number of children.

However, these data comprise a conservative presentation of the total number of children of participants. Program staff reported that participants often provided information only on those children named in the most recent child support orders, and they were frequently resistant to providing information on their other children. The data contained in the case files support that contention. For example, a married participant might have had two children with a current spouse and two others from a past relationship for whom he is paying child support. The case file for such a participant might refer to all four children but have data only on the two for whom child support had been ordered. Thus, although it is possible to report accurately that there was a total of at least 459 children who were associated with these 212 program participants (or 2.17 children per participant), data were provided for only 261 children (57%), strongly suggesting that the number of children is almost certainly understated to an unknown degree.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> More recent program data are more limited, but they mirror the conclusion presented here that the true number of children of program participants is unknown. For example, the 94 program participants whose cases were opened between April 1 and September 30, 2002 have 256 children associated with them (2.72 children per participant), but data were available for only 139 of them (54%).

A second statement that can be made from the available data on children is that program participants often did not know the ages of their children. As Exhibit 9 shows, there is a substantial minority (40%) of program participants who could not provide accurate information on the ages of all of their children. This information strongly supports a circumstantial conclusion that these noncustodial parents had no current relations with at least some of their children or, at best, only very limited interaction with them. Of the 459 children who can be identified, reliable data on their ages were only available for 261 of them, or somewhat more than half (57%).

#### **Exhibit 9: Program Participants' Knowledge of Children's Ages by Program Site**

Program Site	Know Ages of All Children		Know Ages of Some Children		Do Not Know Ages of Children		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	37	73%	4	8%	10	20%	51
Broward	27	59%	2	4%	17	37%	46
Dade	24	75%	5	16%	3	9%	32
Leon	22	50%	4	9%	18	41%	43
Polk	21	46%	9	20%	16	35%	46
<b>Total</b>	131	60%	24	11%	64	29%	219

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

For those 261 children for whom age data were available, the age distribution is well dispersed across the range. As Exhibit 10 demonstrates, program participants had children of all ages for whom they were responsible.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Exhibit 10: Distribution of the Ages of Program Participants' Children**

Children's Age Group	# of Children	% of Children
Age newborn - 5	93	36%
Age 6-10	90	34%
Age 11-14	49	19%
Age 15+	29	11%

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

There is also one conclusion that can be drawn about some of the male program participants and their children. A sizeable minority (23%) of male participants have fathered their children with more than one mother. Moreover, since there is a very high incidence (24%) of program participants for whom it cannot readily be determined whether multiple mothers are involved, the true number is almost certainly higher, and possibly much higher, than the 23% that can be substantiated. Exhibit 11 summarizes

<sup>13</sup> Again, the more recent (though more limited) program data show results that are very similar to the file review data summarized in Exhibit 10. For the 139 children for whom data were available, 41 children (29%) were aged newborn through five, 55 children (40%) were aged six through ten, 28 children (20%) were aged eleven through fourteen and 14 children (10%) were aged 15 or older.

what is known about the incidence of multiple mothers among the 194 male program participants.

### Exhibit 11: Male Program Participants Who Have Fathered Children with More Than One Mother by Program Site

Program Site	One Mother		More Than One Mother		Cannot Determine		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	20	56%	1	3%	15	42%	36
Broward	26	57%	13	28%	7	15%	46
Dade	18	62%	4	14%	7	24%	29
Leon	20	49%	11	27%	10	24%	41
Polk	19	45%	15	36%	8	19%	42
<b>Total</b>	103	53%	44	23%	47	24%	194

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001. This analysis removes the cases for the 25 female program participants (15 from Brevard, 3 from Dade, 3 from Leon, and 4 from Polk).

A final conclusion that can be drawn from the available data about the other parents of program participants' children is that most of these relationships were non-marital. As Exhibit 12 demonstrates, the number of participants who were still married (though generally now separated) or were once married to the person with the custodial care of their children comprises only 32 percent of the whole, compared with 58 percent who are or were non-marital partners. (For the remaining 10 percent, the relationship is not clear from the case file.)

### Exhibit 12: Program Participants' Relationships to the Other Parent of Their Children by Program Site

Program Site	Spouse		Former Spouse		Significant Other		Former Significant Other		Cannot Determine		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	3	6%	24	47%	8	16%	16	31%	0	0%	51
Broward	8	17%	2	4%	16	35%	15	33%	5	11%	46
Dade	5	16%	1	3%	11	34%	12	38%	3	9%	32
Leon	3	7%	10	23%	4	9%	15	34%	12 <sup>14</sup>	27%	44
Polk	3	7%	10	22%	8	17%	24	52%	1	2%	46
<b>Total</b>	22	10%	47	21%	47	21%	82	37%	21	10%	219

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

<sup>14</sup> The unusually high number of "cannot determine" responses for the Leon County program site is probably a function of inadequate case management oversight.

## What Were the Barriers to Securing Employment?

The most striking single impression that emerges from a study of the program participants in these responsible fatherhood programs is the high number and severity of the obstacles that most of them must overcome in order to become employed. Being able to obtain a job represents a considerable challenge for both the participants and for the program staff whose responsibility it is to help them emphasize what strengths and skills they do have and assist them in locating an employer willing to hire them. A very large majority of the participants (86%) has at least one significant barrier that makes it difficult for an employer to consider them seriously. Some barriers are primarily logistical, like having a reliable means of transportation to get to work (a limitation confronted by 58% of all participants). Other barriers are more specifically related to requirements of the jobs themselves, like having achieved an adequate educational level (a limitation faced by the 35% of participants who do not even have a high school level education).

The problem created by the presence of any one individual barrier, however, is further compounded when participants have multiple barriers to overcome, and this situation is also very common among the participants in these programs. A majority of all of the participants (69%) has two or more barriers, and there are quite sizable minorities of participants who have three or more barriers (46%) and even four or more barriers (29%). The analyses and tables presented in this section of the report describe these barriers in more detail and quantify the extent to which these barriers occur both individually and cumulatively. The analyses and tables are derived from a comprehensive “moment in time” file review of 219 case files that was conducted in late 2001, but the section concludes with some more recent, though more limited, data that substantially uphold the initial findings.

### **Individual Barriers**

Some of the barriers to employment that program participants had to overcome were specifically related to work preparedness. An employer can reasonably expect a job applicant who is no longer a teen (only 4 percent of program participants were less than 20 years of age) to meet certain qualifications. For example, a job applicant should have attained a certain minimal level of education, have one or more skills that have useful applications in the workplace, have a pre-existing record of employment and be able to communicate with others. However, as Exhibit 13 demonstrates, each of these criteria represented a limitation for at least some participants, and those with less than a high school education constituted more than a third of all participants. These limitations would require an employer who has an uncommonly undemanding task to be performed or an especially indulgent work environment or both.

### Exhibit 13: Program Participants' Barriers Related to Work Preparedness by Program Site

Program Site	Less Than High School Education		Unstable Work Experience		Poor Communication Skills		Lack of Useful Work Skills		Total Open Cases
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	18	35%	14	27%	4	8%	8	16%	51
Broward	21	46%	19	41%	7	15%	22	48%	46
Dade	11	34%	7	22%	2	6%	11	34%	32
Leon	6	14%	7	16%	0	0%	7	16%	44
Polk	21	46%	16	35%	3	7%	17	37%	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>219</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

There were also barriers to employment that related primarily to the social preparedness of an individual in being ready, willing or able to work. Participants who had limited access to reliable transportation, records of criminal convictions, substance abuse issues, medical or mental health issues or issues with homelessness might have all required special assistance to stabilize their problems before they were capable of holding a job. As Exhibit 14 confirms, these limitations were frequently encountered among the program participants. More than half of them (58%) had transportation limitations. Many participants in this category had no driver's license because the state had revoked it as part of the child support enforcement, while others simply lacked any dependable means of getting around. For communities with weak public transportation systems (such as Brevard and Polk Counties), the prevalence of transportation limitations was particularly high. Also, more than half (55%) of the participants had criminal records, which might prevent potential employers from giving them full consideration. Substance abusers (20%) and those with medical or mental health problems (18%) were common as well.

### Exhibit 14: Program Participants' Barriers Related to Social Preparedness by Program Site

Program Site	Homeless		Medical or Mental Health Limits		Drug or Alcohol Abuse Issues		Criminal Record		Transport Limits		Total Open Cases
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	1	2%	18	35%	18	35%	30	59%	37	73%	51
Broward	0	0%	7	15%	14	30%	38	83%	24	52%	46
Dade	0	0%	4	13%	4	13%	8	25%	20	63%	32
Leon	0	0%	6	14%	2	5%	16	36%	15	34%	44
Polk	1	2%	5	11%	6	13%	29	63%	31	67%	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>219</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

## **Multiple Barriers**

Dealing with any of the participants' individual barriers to employment was a substantial challenge to begin with, but, in fact, most program participants had multiple barriers with which to contend. As Exhibit 15 shows, only a relatively small number of participants (14%) had no particular identified barriers, while a majority (69%) had at least two barriers, and many of them had more than two. Thus, in practice, program staff were frequently confronted with the practical difficulties of helping a participant prepare for and locate a job when that individual might have a complex set of serious and interwoven problems that might have been under development for much of that individual's entire lifetime. For those sites where the incidence of multiple barriers was particularly high, such as Broward or Brevard, those difficulties were further magnified.

**Exhibit 15: Program Participants' Total Number of Barriers (Work Preparedness and Social Preparedness) by Program Site**

Program Site	No Barriers		One Barrier		Two Barriers		Three Barriers		Four or More Barriers		Total Open Cases
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Brevard	4	8%	10	20%	12	24%	5	10%	20	39%	51
Broward	3	7%	5	11%	11	24%	7	15%	20	43%	46
Dade	6	19%	6	19%	6	19%	7	22%	7	22%	32
Leon	13	30%	11	25%	13	30%	6	14%	1	2%	44
Polk	4	9%	7	15%	8	17%	11	24%	16	35%	46
<b>Total</b>	30	14%	39	18%	50	23%	36	16%	64	29%	219

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 219 case files that were open as of December 2001

## **Barriers Data for 2002**

Because the barriers data constituted some of the most important information derived from the file review conducted in late 2001, the issue was revisited in November 2002 using data from the first six months of the Fatherhood Management Information System. Though more limited in scope, these later data were complete enough to confirm that the individual barriers that had been most pronounced in the analysis of earlier participants were the same barriers of concern for participants who enrolled a few months later.<sup>15</sup> The absence of driver's licenses and other transportation limitations remained the most commonly encountered barrier to employment. Criminal records and low educational attainment also retained their second and third positions, respectively. The data are summarized in Exhibit 16.

<sup>15</sup> For more information comparing the initial file review and the subsequent data analysis, see the methodology notes section at the end of this evaluation report. Note that the categories of barriers differ slightly in the revised data system. For examples, "unstable living situation" and "limited ability to speak English" were newly added categories, while "poor communication skills" was deleted as being potentially ambivalent. These differences, however, are unimportant for the present comparison.

**Exhibit 16: Program Participants' Barriers to Employment – April 1 through September 30, 2002**

<b>Barrier to Employment</b>	<b>Number of Occurrences</b>	<b>Percentage of Occurrence</b>
Homeless	1	1%
No Driver's License	68	72%
Other Transportation Limitation	52	55%
Less Than High School Education	37	39%
Unstable Living Situation	17	18%
Limited Ability to Speak English	2	2%
Health or Mental Health Problems	13	14%
Alcohol Abuse	7	7%
Drug Abuse	12	13%
Disabilities	1	1%
Criminal Record	65	69%

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of 94 cases opened in the Fatherhood Management Information System between April 1 and September 30, 2002

**Were Program Participants Able to Obtain and Keep Jobs?**

One of the most important goals of these programs was to help program participants secure employment (preferably full-time employment) and then successfully retain that job over time (preferably for six months or longer). The program was premised on the idea that remunerative work would be required to enable program participants to have the financial wherewithal to make their child support payments. This section examines the programs' experiences in being able to make successful initial placements in jobs and subsequently be able to help those participants retain those positions over time.

The responsible fatherhood programs were successful in making job placements for a substantial minority of their program participants, despite the barriers to employment those participants presented. Over most of the life of the program, 408 of the 980 enrolled program participants (42%) were successfully placed in a full-time job, and an additional 62 program participants (6%) were able to obtain a part-time, seasonal or temporary job. Exhibit 17 summarizes the job placement successes by program site.

**Exhibit 17: Summary of Job Placement Data by Program Site – May 2000 through October 2002**

Program Site	Total Number of Program Participants	Total Number Employed	Total Percentage Employed	Total Number Employed, Full-Time Only	Total Percentage Employed, Full-Time Only
Brevard	125	57	46%	42	34%
Broward	128	88	69%	81	63%
Dade	111	76	68%	55	50%
Leon	311	58	19%	58	19%
Polk	305	191	63%	172	56%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>42%</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of Fatherhood Management Information System data

For the more significant program outcome of holding a position, once placed, for six months or more, the data show a moderate degree of success, although there is clearly some significant attrition that occurred between obtaining the position and holding it for six months. Of those participants who did get a job (48%), about one in four of them (25%) successfully held it for six months or longer. Exhibit 18 summarizes these data for the individual program sites.

**Exhibit 18: Program Participants Who Remained Employed for Six Months or More, by Program Site – May 2000 through October 2002**

Program Site	Total Number of Program Participants	Total Number Employed	Total Percentage Employed	Total Number Employed 6 Months	Number Employed 6 Months – Percentage of All Program Participants	Number Employed 6 Months – Percentage of Employed Program Participants
Brevard	125	57	46%	24	19%	42%
Broward	128	88	69%	31	24%	35%
Dade	111	76	68%	37	33%	49%
Leon	311	58	19%	4	1%	7%
Polk	305	191	63%	22	7%	12%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood program reports to the Department of Health for fiscal year 2000-2001 and the Agency for Workforce Innovation for fiscal year 2001-2002 and July through October 2002

## **Did Program Participants Improve Their Record of Making Child Support Payments?**

Data were not available to the Ounce of Prevention Fund to enable a comprehensive analysis of whether the record of child support payments made by program participants improved as a result of their involvement with the program. Child support payment data is generally controlled by the Department of Revenue, so the information that was available was usually only anecdotal or secondary in nature, such when the programs had placed copies of child support orders in participants' files. Thus, no comprehensive analysis was possible to assess how much program participants owed or what progress they were making toward meeting their recurring monthly obligation or reducing their backlog of indebtedness, called the arrearage.

However, program staff with the Polk County program were able to obtain from their county clerk's office a single month's record (for November 2001) of child support obligations and payment records for 41 of the 46 cases that were open at the time of the file review. This information included for each participant the balance owed at the beginning of the month, the additional amount added to the account during the month, a record of any payments made during the month and the adjusted balance owed at the end of the month. This information was obtained from only one program site, so it does not constitute a random sample of program participants from all program sites. Nonetheless, it offers a revealing "moment in time" portrait of the substantial financial obligation that child support orders can represent for noncustodial parents. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the characteristics of indebtedness shown by Polk County participants differed greatly from those of the other four program sites.

During this one-month period, a large majority (83%) of the Polk County program participants were more indebted in their child support obligation at the end of the month than they had been at the beginning. This increased indebtedness occurred despite the fact that a majority of them (56%) paid at least some child support during the month.<sup>16</sup> For most of those who did make payments, however, the amount paid was not enough to keep pace with the additional amount for which they became further obligated during the month. Thus, they, like the substantial minority who made no payments at all, saw their total child support obligation increase in the course of a month. Exhibit 19 summarizes the results of this analysis. It identifies the participants who did or did not make payments during the month. For those who did make payments, Exhibit 19 also categorizes which program participants were able to reduce their total child support obligation and which ones fell deeper into debt.

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<sup>16</sup> There are no reliable data available to identify the employment status of participants who did or did not make child support payments during that month.

**Exhibit 19: Polk County Program Participants' Child Support Payments, November 2001**

Categories of Program Participant	Reduced Total Child Support Indebtedness		Increased Total Child Support Indebtedness		Category Total and Percentage of All Participants	
	#	% (Row)	#	% (Row)	#	% (Col.)
Made at least some child support payments during the month	7	30%	16	70%	23	56%
Did not make any child support payments during the month	0	0%	18	100%	18	44%
<b>Total Program Participants</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of child support data from the Polk County Clerk of the Court's office

Both the total amount of this indebtedness and the monthly increase are substantial, contributing to the potential for more than half of the Polk County program's participants to be convicted as felons for owing so much child support. For these 41 participants, the average child support obligation rose from \$8,558 at the beginning of the month to \$8,807 at the end of the month, a one-month increase of \$249 per participant (which can be annualized as almost \$3,000 per year). At the end of the month, 21 participants (51%) had total obligations in excess of \$5,000, an amount that matches Florida's statutory threshold for child support obligors who, if they meet certain other criteria, could potentially be prosecuted as third degree felons under Florida law.<sup>17</sup> Six of the Polk County program participants had child support obligations of more than \$20,000, with the largest being a total obligation from three separate child support orders for support of six children that totaled \$42,416.

**Did Program Participants Improve Their Parenting Experiences?**

A unique feature of the Equipping Parents to Strengthen Families program model is the emphasis on the importance of developing good parent-child interactions with noncustodial parents. In addition to the focus on finding jobs so that program participants would have an income that would enable them to make their child support payments, the programs also featured activities to highlight the responsibilities and satisfactions of parenting. The concept underlying the model is that better attitudes toward parenting and better interactions with children would improve the program

<sup>17</sup> The Florida law that established that persistent non-payment of a child support obligation could be prosecuted as a felony was passed in 2001. It includes two criteria, in addition to the \$5,000 threshold, that would, in practice, probably limit the number of cases that could be effectively prosecuted. First, the \$5,000 obligation must have been owed for one full year or more, and, second, there is a key criterion in which it must be established that the obligor "willfully fails to provide support which he or she has the ability to provide." See sect. 1, Chapter 2001-51, Laws of Florida.

participants' motivation for making their child support payments. This section describes the three particular aspects of program services that were most particularly oriented toward the roles and responsibilities of parenting. First, the process of conducting before-and-after assessments that measure participants' attitudes toward parenting is described. Second, the record of participants' involvement with the parenting education classes offered by the programs is assessed. Finally, this section describes what is known about changes in the frequency and quality of participants' visits with their children as a result of their involvement with the program.

### **Standard Assessment Testing**

The programs measured their participants' attitudes about their children and their parenting responsibilities through the use of a standardized assessment instrument called the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI). This instrument is typically administered at the time of program intake (the pre-test) and again at a later time, often in association with case closure (the post-test). In completing the inventory, participants were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with 40 statements about typical parent-child concerns, such as "parents who nurture themselves make better parents," or "strong-willed children must be taught to mind their parents." When both the pre-test and post-test scores are available for a given set of program participants, the difference in scores can be used to indicate whether there has been an improvement in those participants' attitudes toward parenting.

Just prior to the programs' closure, four of the program sites had accumulated enough valid records of pre-test and post-test scores to enable a formal analysis to be conducted. This effort showed that there was, overall, a small, but statistically significant, increase in the average AAPI score. It is unlikely that that this improvement occurred as a result of chance, so the improved scores can reasonably be attributed to the participants' involvement with the programs. Furthermore, two of the four individual program sites (Brevard and Dade) showed improved average scores that were sufficiently large as to be statistically significant at each of those sites, but the other two sites (Broward and Polk) both had small average decreased scores. The key data associated with this analysis are shown in Exhibit 20.

### **Exhibit 20: AAPI Scores Analyses for Four Responsible Fatherhood Programs**

Site	N =	Total # of All Participants	% of All Participants	Average Change of Score	Standard Deviation	Statistically Significant Improvement?
Brevard	13	125	10%	7.08	5.48	Yes
Broward	22	128	17%	-0.32	5.57	No
Dade	51	111	46%	2.37	7.47	Yes
Polk	62	305	20%	-0.82	4.67	No
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>1.05</b>	<b>6.37</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of final program data in the Fatherhood Management Information System, with a 95 percent level of confidence

## **Attendance at Parenting Classes**

The record of program participants' attendance at parenting classes is a process measure and is not in itself a measurable program outcome. However, it does provide a useful indication of the programs' progress toward instilling better attitudes toward parenting among the program participants. Thus, the benchmark of attendance at seven or more parenting classes was used as an accessible proxy for improved knowledge about and attitudes toward parenting responsibilities. The anecdotal reports available at the end of 2001 suggested that attendance was low, and two separate data analyses conducted in April and October 2002 substantiated those observations.

Although all five program sites had implemented by the time of the extensive site visits conducted at the end of 2001 a regular schedule of parenting classes held in accessible community locations that participants could attend, the actual record of attendance was generally reported at that time as being erratic. Program staff during the site visits regularly identified their participants' disinterest in or active resistance toward the parenting classes as one of their most persistent problems. This attitude was further exacerbated for those participants who had transportation limitations or who had conflicts with evening work hours. Incentives (such as food or small prizes) and active support (such as transportation assistance) had only a small beneficial influence on attendance. Program staff conceded then that the actual attendance at any given class was often no more than four or five individuals out of a caseload ranging from 30 to more than 100. One response that the programs made was to provide more personalized attention to participants in their individual encounters with them.<sup>18</sup> However, the full benefit of the parenting classes springs at least in part from the peer group interaction and discussion that are an integral part of the classes, so those individual encounters could not have the same impact that the parenting classes were designed to have.

The data confirm the program directors' observations that attendance at parenting classes was weak. Exhibit 21 shows that only 11 percent of the participants whose cases had been open in March 2002 had attended seven or more of the parenting classes offered by their program. The same question was later reanalyzed with a different set of program participants whose cases were opened between April and September 2002 (i.e., the first six months of the newly revised data system), and the results were more favorable. Of the 94 program participants opened during that time frame, 21 of them (22%) had attended seven or more parenting classes.

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<sup>18</sup> The case file review conducted at that time confirmed that such ad hoc "parent training" occurred regularly at all five program sites.

### Exhibit 21: Participants' Attendance at Parenting Classes – March 2002

Program Site	Number of Participants with Cases Open as of March 31, 2002	Number of Participants Who Had Attended Seven or More Parenting Classes	Percentage of Participants Who Had Attended Seven or More Parenting Classes
Brevard	46	0	0%
Broward	62	7	11%
Dade	31	14	45%
Leon	131	14	11%
Polk	118	8	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>11%</b>

Source: Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida analysis of Fatherhood Management Information System data

### Changes in the Frequency and Quality of Interactions with Children

Providing encouragement to noncustodial parents and helping them to make arrangements for visits with their children was an important part of the programs' activities with their participants. However, the limited data available to measure changes over time in the frequency and quality of program participants' visits with their children are somewhat inconclusive and cannot be used to show that the responsible fatherhood programs were a factor in influencing such visits one way or another. Furthermore, on at least one important point, the data clearly do not match the expectations based on several conversations with program staff.

When the programs were first implemented, they attempted to collect concrete data on the frequency and duration of program participants' visits with their children. However, this approach proved to be impractical, and no useful information was collected on this point for the first two years of program operations. As part of the data system revisions that were implemented in April 2002, a simpler four-question strategy was initiated.

- The participant would be asked at the outset how often visits occurred, and responses would be coded into six categories ranging from “no contact or hardly any contact” to “four or more times a week.” The identical question would be asked again at case closure.
- Similarly, the participant would be asked to rate the quality of the visits, ranging from “very poor” to “very good.” This would also be asked again at case closure.
- Also, the participant would be asked (one time only) whether the other parent was “uncooperative,” “partially cooperative” or “fully cooperative” in allowing visits.<sup>19</sup>
- Finally, the participant would be asked (one time only) to identify any existing obstacles (other than an uncooperative other parent) in arranging visits.

<sup>19</sup> This question also had a fourth response: “not applicable – child is not living with other parent.”

When data became available in October 2002 for the 94 program participants and 139 children whose cases were opened between April 1 and September 30, 2002 (a six-month period), it became apparent that the revised strategy was resulting in more information. However, at least some of the new information was counterintuitive. For example, one unexpected finding was that only a few program participants were reporting problems, which contrasted with the observations frequently made by program staff that problems did indeed exist. There were several key conclusions from this rather limited data set.

- For the majority of the children (53%), participants reported that the other parent was fully cooperative with arranging visits.
- For just less than half of them (47%), participants reported that there were no obstacles to such visits at all.
- Also for just less than half of them (47%), participants reported that visits already occur at least once a week.
- For almost three-fourths of the children (74%), participants said that the quality of visits was “very good,” while only a small number (6%) were rated as “poor” or “very poor.”

There are two possible explanations for these unexpected results, and both probably have at least a contributing role. First, since 88 of the 139 children (63%) are all from a single program site (Polk County), the dataset is not fully representative of all of the program participants in all of the program sites. This hypothesis is supported by anecdotes from other program sites (such as Broward County) that are under-represented in this dataset. The second explanation, which was initially suggested by program staff, was that program participants are reluctant to state that their visits with their children are infrequent or that they are encountering any problems in arranging them. The result may be an unknown number of instances where the program participants are “telling the man what he wants to hear.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Conclusions and Lessons Learned for Future Programs of Similar Design**

The Equipping Parents to Strengthen Families program model was operative in five locations in the state over a 32-month period, from May 2000 through December 2002. During that time, the programs’ sponsor, Florida’s Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, established that some beneficial results were possible in accordance with the program design. The program’s successes were often quite limited in their extent, and some questions (notably those related to child support payments) cannot currently be

<sup>20</sup> The data presented here discuss what was reported at intake only. No meaningful assessment of data at the time of case closure was possible. In part this is because, as discussed here, frequency and quality of visits were already being reported as high to begin with. More importantly, however, for the large majority of the cases that were closed during this short time period (33 of 38, or 87%), the reason for closure was non-compliance, so no information was available on these questions.

answered, but these limitations must be seen in the light of an important fact about the program's target population: it was a highly problematic group with which to work, and they collectively exhibited numerous and formidable barriers to securing employment. The programs' accomplishments included the following.

- The five programs were set up to do substantially what they said they would do. They provided personalized services to 980 low-income noncustodial parents who were in need of assistance to stabilize their lives, find employment, make their child support payments and become better equipped to accept their responsibilities as parents.
- The programs provided their services to program participants who had real and substantial needs. Fully 86 percent of them had at least one significant barrier to obtaining employment, and the most commonly encountered barriers – transportation restrictions, criminal records and limited educational background – are difficult to surmount. Furthermore, 69 percent of the program participants had more than one barrier, thus complicating the challenge of getting a job.
- Despite these obstacles, almost half (48%) of all program participants served were able to secure at least one job during their involvement with the program. Furthermore, for seven-eighths (87%) of those who did obtain a job, the position was full-time rather than part-time or seasonal. Also, one-fourth (25%) of those who secured a job were able to hold it for at least six months.
- The programs also had at least some beneficial influence on program participants' attitudes toward parenting. An analysis of the assessment data collected at four program sites shows that there was an overall measurable improvement that was statistically significant and can be attributed to program activities and services.

The experiences over the past two and a half years of involvement with the programs also provides the basis for a number of constructive suggestions based on the lessons that have been learned in the course of implementing the programs, monitoring their progress, speaking with program participants and staff, reviewing the program's case files and data reports and engaging in various other activities and interactions involving their operations. Among them are the following comments:

- The absence of any useful outcome information related to child support payments is disappointing. Any subsequent programs of similar design should engage officials with the child support enforcement office at the Florida Department of Revenue to determine whether programs would be able to have access to data on child support obligations and payments made. Without such an agreement, those future programs will be subject to the same limitation as those described in this report.
- The case management model is essential for effective local program operations, and situations where case management protocols were not followed created many of the more important problems these programs encountered. For examples: when data were not entered, the record of information about program participants was incomplete; when entries were not made in the case file, it is not possible to "tell the story" about a program participant's particular situation; when no supervisory review is provided, cases can remain open without purpose or services will be provided in, at

best, an unfocused manner. Thus, any future programs should require local program directors to be appropriately experienced individuals with MSW degrees and demonstrable experience with operating programs that are based on the case management model.

- The use of a logic model is recommended to create an overall structure that both helps define the program's operations and the sequence of events and also to frame the evaluation questions for the program. One particular concern that is especially appropriate for a program that is designed to work with a challenging target population such as low-income or unemployed noncustodial parents is to set the targets at realistic levels.
- The comments offered by some program staff that serving the needs of noncustodial mothers is different than serving the needs of noncustodial fathers has merit. Future programs should consider limiting their participant base by gender to enable a program focus that is not compromised by adjustments for gender.
- If the future project is to be a multi-site operation, there are several particular points that should be considered. First, it would be advantageous to use completely uniform program models throughout all the sites. Second, it would also be desirable to select a single parenting skills curriculum to be able to measure more precisely what skills are (or are not) being learned. The curriculum should be culturally appropriate for all local population groups served. Finally, ample allowance should be made to enable program staff at different sites to interact and consult with each other frequently, through workshops, conference calls or other communication mechanisms, to improve the programs' ability to respond to challenges in a consistent fashion.
- The experience with these programs showed that a large number of program participants had criminal records, and it is likely that this reality would be reflected in similar projects elsewhere. Planners for any such projects should do a literature review to explore the experiences that employment programs serving ex-convicts have had in order to determine if there are some useful ideas about "what works" that could be incorporated into the design of those projects.
- Similarly, attendance at parenting classes was a widely acknowledged weak spot in the operations of these programs, although as many as 22 percent of the later program participants met the attendance criterion. Future programs should also research this point to determine if there is any professional literature that examines parenting class attendance and offers any constructive suggestions for improving the rate of attendance.
- The recording of before-and-after data for participants' interactions with their children could be improved. One possibility that future programs should consider would be to use a construction called a retrospective pre-post analysis in which the program participant would be asked at the point of case closure to assess his situation as it would have been at the point of enrollment in the program. This technique might result in more useful conclusions about the impact of the program than are currently available.

- Data entry systems require attention, particularly at the point when they are being implemented, to ensure that data are being entered accurately and completely. Ample review time is necessary to ensure that those who will use the system at the reporting end have an understanding of what they are doing and how it affects those on the assessment end. Similarly, programs need to make a commitment to frequent and regular reviews of the reported data and be prepared to interact with program operators when questions arise.
- Being able to see a program in operation is a valuable experience. Programs should make allowance for site visits that occur frequently enough and last long enough to be able to develop both a working relationship with program site staff and a high degree of confidence about how programs actually conduct their business with their program participants.
- The operation of these programs demonstrated that community partners play a vital role in supporting the program's work. Future programs should plan to cultivate a strong, interactive network of all appropriate local officials and service providers who can be consulted when a need arises.
- Some program staff identified two particular concerns that they felt were not adequately covered by the programs' design, but for which they felt there was a need that should be addressed in any subsequent programs. One concern was that the program did not give any particular credit for participants who pursued educational improvements, despite the prevalence (35%) of those who lacked even a high school education. The second concern expressed by program staff was that there was a sizable unmet need among their participants for legal support in general and assistance with child support modifications in particular.

## Methodology Notes

This program evaluation of five TANF-funded responsible fatherhood programs in Florida was conducted in accordance with nationally recognized standards for program evaluation. These standards have been developed and promulgated by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, a national committee operating out of the Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University.<sup>21</sup> The 30 standards promulgated by the Joint Committee provide guidance relating to the utility, feasibility, propriety and accuracy of the program evaluation process. They are commonly referred to in the evaluation field as the “red book standards.”

There were several sequential phases of project work that preceded the composition, internal review and release of this program evaluation report. These phases included the

<sup>21</sup> The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, James R. Sanders, Chair, *The Program Evaluation Standards, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: How to Assess Evaluations of Educational Programs*, 1994, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA

preliminary survey that began in mid-2001, the initial fieldwork and comprehensive file review and initial data analyses. These activities were all part of an unpublished process evaluation that was concluded in May 2002. Subsequent fieldwork and analyses followed during the latter half of 2002. The following paragraphs provide some additional information about the approaches and procedures used during the various phases of this program evaluation.

During the preliminary survey phase, evaluation activities focused on becoming familiar with the programs' design and operations. This included a careful review of the data system design, data forms and data reports from the program sites. During that same period, the evaluator for the Ounce of Prevention Fund also made half-day site visits to four of the five program sites and also participated in group discussions with all of the program administrators. The preliminary survey phase culminated with a prospectus for a process evaluation that was jointly approved in early October 2001 by the Executive Director of Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and the Director of the Research, Evaluation and Systems Unit of the Ounce of Prevention Fund.

The initial fieldwork phase that followed was conducted in late November and early December 2001. The heart of this phase included intensive two-day site visits to all five program sites by the evaluator of the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the research associate for the Commission. They met with program staff to explain the purpose of the visit, and they made a comprehensive review of the case files of almost all program participants whose cases were open at the time of the visit.<sup>22</sup> The file review process used a standard data collection instrument, and the two reviewers formally checked each other's work frequently and often consulted informally on a case by case basis to ensure a consistent interpretation of the information in the files. During the site visits the reviewers also met both individually and in small groups with some program participants at all five sites. While there, they also observed various program activities that program staff were involved with on behalf of their participants, including courtroom counseling, the procedures used during the intake process, telephone counseling, employability assessments, parenting classes and various other program activities. At each site they also spoke with employees of the local courts or other community partners to gain a better understanding of the degree to which the programs were connected to other community stakeholders. The fieldwork phase culminated in an extensive oral presentation of highlights and impressions to members of the Ounce of Prevention Fund's management team (including the Executive Director of the Commission) in late December 2001.

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<sup>22</sup> The qualifying phrase "almost all" refers specifically to two situations where not all files were reviewed. First, at the Brevard site, there were three files that had been temporarily removed from the file drawer, and this was not discovered until just before departure. However, a cursory review of those cases failed to identify any special features about those participants to suggest that they were non-representative in any way from the 51 cases that had already been reviewed there. Second, at the Leon site, there was a small stack of files that had been set aside to be closed precisely because the program had little information about them and had lost contact with them. Since they were known to have many missing data fields, there was no point in making the extra effort to include them in addition to the 44 cases that were reviewed at that site.

The initial data analysis phase followed the conclusion of the initial fieldwork. One principal focus involved various qualitative assessments of the numerous interviews and observations that had been conducted as part of the initial fieldwork. This became the basis for most of the descriptions and conclusions expressed above in the sections on what the programs did and how they differed or were similar to each other. Another focus was on the quantitative analysis of material collected during fieldwork, particularly in connection with the case file review. The case file review had involved a careful reading of the entire record for almost all of the program participants whose cases were open at the time of the site visit, ranging from 32 to 51 case files per program site. Thus, the total of 219 case files that were reviewed constitutes a highly representative cross-section of information about the program participants who were being served by the five programs at the approximate mid-point of the programs' duration. These file review data are the primary basis for the descriptions and conclusions presented in the sections above on the program participants and their children and their barriers to employment.<sup>23</sup>

During the same time period that the initial data analyses were being conducted, staff with the Ounce of Prevention Fund also completed and implemented a comprehensive overhaul of the Fatherhood Management Information System. This was an initially unforeseen activity that became a substantial "project within a project" that resulted in a new set of data forms, some associated instructions and a new on-line data entry methodology, all of which were implemented at the individual program sites as of April 1, 2002. The revisions constituted a more efficient data collection process by eliminating some earlier forms and questions that were redundant or otherwise problematic. The revisions also established some new routines for improving the quality of data collected in several data fields, most notably in connection with information on participants' children, on services provided to program participants and on participants' barriers to employment.

A new program direction became apparent at the end of June 2002, which altered somewhat the programs' focus and all subsequent evaluation work. During the discussion about contract renewals, Workforce Florida, Inc., the primary funder for the programs, determined to close the programs by the end of December 2002, six months earlier than the initially envisioned closure of June 2003. Thus, the programs began immediately to focus on reaching their contractual targets within the abbreviated time frame, and program evaluation activities began to focus more on participant outcomes. The evaluator for The Ounce of Prevention Fund made additional full-day site visits to

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<sup>23</sup> A subsequent data set for 94 program participants whose cases were opened at the four continuing programs (i.e., Brevard, Broward, Dade and Polk, but excluding Leon) between April 1 and September 30, 2002 is less complete and less representative than the file review of 219 participants. The earlier data set includes data from all five programs, while the later data set eliminates Leon completely and substantially under-represents Broward as well. Furthermore, it is necessarily skewed to represent program participants only during their earliest involvement with the programs. However, on all points where comparisons can be made (including the matters of demographics and participant characteristics), the later data set can be shown to be substantially consistent with the earlier file review data. The inclusion of Exhibit 16 in this report, showing an updated analysis of participants' barrier to employment, illustrates this point.

the four remaining sites in August 2002.<sup>24</sup> The purpose of these site visits was to ensure that existing program descriptions and processes were accurate and that data were being collected (using the now-revised data system) that could ultimately be used to draw conclusions about program outcomes for participants.

For the remaining questions about program outcomes, a variety of other data sources was used, each being selected as being most appropriate for the question under study.

- For the analysis of initial job placements, the Fatherhood Management Information System contained reliable data over the life of the program that could be used to present job placement results for the 980 program participants served between May 2000 and October 2002.
- The analysis of job retentions for six months was taken directly from the reports of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood to the Agency for Workforce Innovation, since Commission staff require that the individual program sites specifically document each retention claim before it is reported. This is a high standard of proof that improves the reliability of the job retention data.<sup>25</sup>
- Information on the child support payment obligations of program participants and their actual payments was never systematically available to The Ounce of Prevention Fund. Consequently, no comprehensive assessment of outcomes in connection with child support payments was possible. However, during the course of the two-day site visit to Polk County in December 2001, program staff there were able to supply the evaluators with data obtained from their county clerk's office for the preceding month (November 2001) for 41 of their 46 then-open cases. The data records showed payment obligations and actual payments made during that one month period. These data offered a revealing "moment in time" portrait of the substantial financial obligation that child support orders can represent for noncustodial parents. The analysis of those child support payments is limited in duration and location and cannot be used to make inferences about whether the programs can successfully influence participants to increase the frequency or amounts of payments over time. Nonetheless, the conclusions from that analysis are instructive, and for that reason it is included as part of this evaluation report.
- Information on the formal assessment testing of changes in parental attitudes was derived from the relatively small subset of all program participants at each program site who completed both the pre-test and the post-test for the AAPI assessment instrument. The average differences for each site were then analyzed with a standard statistical test to determine whether there had been a statistically significant degree of improvement as a result of their involvement with the program.
- Attendance at parenting classes was analyzed using data from the Fatherhood Management Information System, and this was done twice for two mutually exclusive

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<sup>24</sup> The Leon program site had been closed at the end of June 2002. The four program sites in Brevard, Broward, Dade and Polk Counties continued.

<sup>25</sup> Beginning in July 2002 the program sites also began reporting regularly on three-month retentions as well as six-month retentions. However, there was no "value added" in analyzing them separately, since there were no comparable data on three-month retentions from the earlier years of the program.

sets of program participants. The first analysis included all 388 participants whose cases were open as of March 31, 2002. The subsequent analysis was limited to participants whose cases were opened over the six month period following that date. Since this was the period during which the revised data system was first being used, there was some interest in knowing whether the improved ability to report services received would make a difference in the results.<sup>26</sup>

- The discussion of frequency and quality of program participants' visits with their children was informed by an analysis of data collected through the Fatherhood Management Information System for 94 program participants (representing 139 children) whose cases were opened between April 1 and September 30, 2002 (excluding Leon County). This was the first six months that the revised data system was in operation and represented the first information that was available to address these questions.

In summary, the data for this program evaluation had several sources, but the qualitative information collected during all of the site visits, the comprehensive file review and selected data runs from the Fatherhood Management Information System constitute the principal sources. These data, once analyzed, became the basis for the composition of this program evaluation report. The evaluator for The Ounce of Prevention Fund was the principal author, but technical assistance was provided by other staff, including, in particular, the research associate and the program specialist for Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The project was supervised by the Director of Research, Evaluation and Systems for The Ounce of Prevention Fund. The final draft of this program evaluation report was also subject to comments from the Executive Director of Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, and the Director of Communications and the Vice President of The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida.

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<sup>26</sup> This, in fact, appeared to be the case, since the later group, who had only six months during which to attend seven or more parenting classes, had a 22 percent attendance rate, compared with the earlier 11 percent attendance rate for a larger set of participants, many of whose cases would have been open for a longer period, thus offering more opportunities to complete the minimum of seven attendances.